

PRIMITIVE MAN

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PRIMITIVE MAN

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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN RELIGION AND MORALITY AMONG THE BHILS

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Thandla, India

THE Bhils of whom we here write number about 500,000 souls, and inhabit the Vindhya range and its foothills in Central India. In our territory they constitute the immense majority of the population. They are not at all numerous in the towns and cities. They live chiefly in the open country and up in the hills. They are all farmers.

Some of the Bhils live among the other castes. They stand, as it were, on the margin of the Hindu castes; they have no place therein. They do not recognize the Brahmins as sacrificers or priests. They content themselves with the services of their own sorcerers. Attempts have been and are continually being made to hale them into the Brahmin system. But they are ranked among the animists.

The data in the following paper are based on the writer's studies of the Bhils of Thandla, among whom he has lived continuously, except from 1917 to 1920, since 1914. He has been engaged in mission work in India since 1901. He was director of the school for catechists for the missions of Rajputana from 1904 to 1914.

From 1917 to 1920 he was director of a farming colony for mixed castes at Suket in Kotah State. He knows Hindu and Urdu and has taught these languages for years. He reads and understands Guzrati. He speaks Bhili, the dialect of Guzrati in use among the Bhils. On the ethnological data here given he has also sought the counsel of other missionaries among the Bhils as well as of his native Bhil catechists.

Bhil children receive their names in infancy. The names are often derived from the names of Hindu deities. Very often children are named after the day of the week on which they were born; thus, Somrio, from Somwār (Monday); Manglio, from Mangalwar (Tuesday); Baddio, from Budh (Wednesday); Sakrio, from Sukrāwar (Friday); Taorio, from Tāwar (Saturday); Ditio, from Ditwār (Sunday). In connection with illness, in order to drive away and perhaps to cause disgust in the evil spirit, a name is changed to a foul one, such as Gobrio, cow-dung; Dhulro, dirt; Ukherio, manure heap.

The Bhils divide the human life span into four periods: *nanhā-panā*, that is, infancy (*nanhā* = small); *gawān*, puberty; *adhā ādmī*, an adult (*adhā ādmī* = half of a man; that is to say, one who has lived half an ordinary life); *dokro, dayo admi*, old man.

If you ask about a child's age, they will answer: *dhāwe*, he takes the breast; or, he walks on all fours; or, he tends the goats (five to eight or nine years); or, he tends the cows (ten years); or, he ploughs (fourteen years); or, *gawān hai*, he has reached puberty.

In answer to the same question regarding a girl's age they will by a gesture indicate to you the size of the water vessel she can carry from the river. Or, they will say: she can grind grain by hand (twelve years); or, her breasts are developing (thirteen years); or, she wears the breast covering (fourteen or fifteen years); or *gawān hai*, that is, she is ready to marry, or, rather to cohabit.

I do not know of any special names for these various divisions, and I believe that there are none.

There is no fixed age for marriage. The more often, it depends on the matter of money. From 150 to 200 rupees are given for a girl; in view of the wedding expenses, a hundred rupees more may be demanded. It is this point which determines the marriage age.

A father will need the money. So he will hasten the marriage of his daughter. Another father will need help for work around the house. So, in order to have a daughter-in-law with him, he will hasten the marriage of his son. One sees children of eight or nine years already married.

Others will have a daughter and will need a boy to work in the fields. Often a widow will take a prospective son-in-law into her house. He will pay nothing for his wife, but will have to work seven years for his (future) mother-in-law before acquiring the right to marry her daughter. Sometimes the marriage is arranged at the end of one, two, or three years (among our Christians when we judge that such living together under the same roof may involve moral hazards), and the son-in-law ends his time of waiting and marries; but he cannot leave his mother-in-law and go to look after his own farm and to set up a separate household of his own.

There is no fixed age after which the young are looked upon as full-fledged members of the tribe. As for males, even the young children assist at caste reunions and take their place therein. Authority comes gradually.

There is no system of physical training designed to inure the young to hardships or to develop bodily strength, agility, or skill. There are no set customs, rites, taboos, or superstitions observed to make sure the infant will grow up strong and healthy. The young children just grow up like little animals.

There are no organized games. Hunting and fishing absorb the interest of the young boys. The girls' play is often imitative; small girls will, for example, play at accouchement.

There is no express method of teaching children about animals, birds, trees, and so forth. The children trap what they can. No one troubles to give them any instruction whatsoever in any branch.

There is no system of writing. They do not read. As for counting, the people, to do so, take grains of maize and proceed by *pachol* (from the word for five). They will say: I have sold my ox for seven pachols (that is to say for 35 rupees), or for seven pachols and two rupees (37 rupees). If you have business to transact with them, you have to do it in this fashion.

There is no organized system of vocational training. All the

Bhils are farmers and in general they know how to use the saw and hammer to repair their farming implements. From the time the children are able to take part in the work of their parents and to lend aid therein they do so. It is thus that they learn the ordinary skills.

In their play, the children imitate the occupational activities of their elders. They make miniature ploughs and carts. They amuse themselves by modeling oxen, elephants, and buffalos in clay. The little girls do likewise as regards household occupations. They also make rag dolls. Women do not sew. This is the job of the men—and what sewing!

There is absolutely no system of religious instruction for the young. The children assist at the sorcerer's rites, carried out above all in cases of illness. For that matter, the Bhil, young or old, have no regular religious practices.

As for morality, so far as precept goes, each one carries on as he can. Veracity is rare; honesty, very rare. To get drunk is not considered wrong. As for chastity, no rule obtains. The only check is the fear of the fine which the caste council (*Panchayat*) may impose. This holds for the women as well as for the men.

Respect for parents does not exist, or at least is not the rule. Children frequently insult or strike their parents.

The Bhil is very hospitable, and will never refuse food or lodging to any one. But this does not prevent him from taking advantage of his host, to spy on him, to steal from him, or to denounce him.

All the various virtues may be practised by the Bhil so long as he has no incentive or motive for violating them. But he cannot resist temptations. In fact he has no idea that one can resist them. Naturally, there are exceptions, but these are not due to any system of training.

While the Bhil is, in general, very reserved, there is no set code of etiquette that is inculcated in the young.

No religious motive is proposed to the child to get him to observe moral law. The only motive is the fear of blows or of the police. Nor are natural motives, such as pride, shame, ambition, and so forth, appealed to. If a father should catch his boy lying or stealing, he would strike him and would berate him with gross

remarks,—as likely as not the one that women and children use on all occasions, *Teri mā* (=thy mother, that is, I will violate thy mother). This is the ordinary insult launched at animals and at human beings. If the quarrel is prolonged, all the members of the family are one by one included. This expression comes out even during catechetical instruction. If you explain something that particularly strikes your questioner, he will break out with *Teri . . .*, but rarely goes farther or finishes the formula.

Delinquent children are not scolded. Formal moral instructions and exhortations are not given to children by parents or others. Moral stories and such means are not used to inculcate moral knowledge and conduct. Only blows and insults,—no instructions,—are resorted to.

As punishment for misbehavior, blows are given. If they are excessive, the child has a means of escape. He knows that there is not a household that will refuse him food and a place to sleep. Anyhow, all the men,—but not the women,—sleep in the open.

Customs,—such as dieting, fasting, food taboos, separation of young of opposite sex, infliction of pain,—to train the young in endurance, in sex control, in stoicism, and so forth, do not exist. Again, there are no puberty rites for boys or girls.

Children live with their parents and are reared by them. If the father dies, the mother keeps the children so long as she remains unmarried. But once she marries again, the children go to the nearest male relative of their deceased father. The Bhils dearly love their children and take it very hard to separate from them. But one does not find concern for their morals. Families differ somewhat in this matter, but there is no such thing as a system or religious belief connected with morals.

Generally speaking, moral principles and a moral or religious system are quite absent. Bhil religion is reduced to some practices proper to certain days, periods, or circumstances. The child grows up without rule and without control, except for occasional abusive language or blows when he is guilty of misconduct that offends somebody or that conflicts with someone's interest.

**RELIGION AND MORALITY AMONG THE IBO OF
SOUTHERN NIGERIA.**

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THE Ibo are a West African tribe of Southern Nigeria. They inhabit the Niger River region, especially the southern bank. Their lands begin about forty miles inland from the coast. Their numbers are estimated at from 6,000,000 to 12,000,000 souls. The territory occupied by them is very thickly populated. Villages of from 15,000 to 20,000 inhabitants are common. While the Ibo all speak a common language, with dialectic differences, there is little sense of "national" loyalty or cohesion. Loyalties are to one's own village, rather than to the tribe as such. A man, for instance, who has gone to work over an extended time far from his native village will nearly always return to marry a girl from his own village, although there appears to be no strict law of local village endogamy.

The data given in the present short paper are derived from personal observation of the writer who lived among the Ibo five years, from 1922 to 1927. He was stationed at Onitsha, but his missionary duties carried him all over the Ibo territory and brought him into frequent contact with the Ibo's neighbors, the Efik. He speaks the Ibo language. The following notes refer to the Ibo, except where otherwise stated. The Ibo language is quite different from the Efik, but the customs of the two tribes are very much the same.

RELIGION

The Ibo believe in a Supreme Being, Tcu'kwu or Tcu'kwune'ke, who is all good and who is the creator or maker of all things. The meaning of "Tcu'kwu" is not known, but "-ne'ke" means "creator" or "maker". It is not clear whether Tcu'kwu is the "maker", or the "creator" in the strict sense of the term.

Under Tcu'kwu are both good and evil supernatural beings whom we may call, for short, "spirits". Tcu'kwu and the good spirits are good and will do no harm. Hence the natives do not bother much about them. Neither prayer nor sacrifice is offered

to Tcu'kwu,—not even in great crises or in cases of grave danger. The evil spirits are, however, propitiated lest they do harm to one, and are invoked so they will do harm to one's enemies.

Some of the good spirits exercise a protective guardianship over the people, there being one or more for each family and each village. There is a less common belief in individual guardian spirits. Such a personal protector will travel around with the individual, perched on his left shoulder. Sometimes a person who has such a personal guardian will touch his left shoulder with his right hand when saying good-bye to a friend. The meaning of the gesture is: "May my guardian spirit take care of you."

Wooden statues or images are made to represent spirits. Worship is paid, not to these "idols" as such, but to the spirits that hover around the image or are in a special manner associated with it.

In former times, about once a year a young girl used to be sacrificed as a scapegoat. The victim chosen was struck, kicked, spat upon, and so forth by the natives, and thus the evil attaching to the striker was taken away. The girl was finally flung into the Niger River.

All the young men aspire to belong to the Mâ', (â like "aw" in English awe, but nasalized, and with glottal stop). The word means literally "spirit". In this secret society, masks are used by the members. When the masked men appear in public, the women and children, and all who are not initiates, flee. The maskers carry a peeled stick with which they strike the people. The members of the society domineer over the women and other non-members. Sometimes a single masked member comes out and dances alone; at other times several members or a whole troop will turn out. If the masked man is recognized, it is taboo to mention his name. The dancers are supposed to be spirits.

On one occasion, to the writer's knowledge, a white man who saw a masked dancer beating some boys with the peeled stick, wrested the stick from the dancer and flogged him severely with it. The dancer took the beating stoically without a whimper, and at the end danced away seemingly none the worse. Result: the white man lost prestige, the dancer gained, for, the people agreed "He is a spirit, and flogging can't hurt spirits". Here was objective proof that the Mâ' members were what they claimed to be.

A society similar to the Ibo Mâ' is found among the Efik, with, however a different name, the Egbô, meaning in Efik, "evil spirit".

Male infants are circumcised soon after birth. Clitoridectomy is carried out for girls just before marriage during the fattening period. Now it is often performed when the girls are very young. Neither rite, however, has a religious significance, so far as the writer could discover.

Infants are placed sprawling on the ground, face up. A gourd of water is held about three feet up from the child and the water is poured into the open mouth of the infant who gurgles and splutters under the treatment. This custom,—found among the Efik as well as among the Ibo,—is believed to promote the infant's growth, and to be good especially for its lungs. The practice, which is of daily occurrence, is not however religious. It is purely hygienic.

The Ibo believe in a life after death. When you die you must travel far before reaching your destination. So pots and food are put on the grave, as utensils and provisions for the journey. Three pagan Ibo, accused of murder, were convicted and condemned to death at Calabar. Before their execution they became Christians. On the morning of their execution, they insisted vigorously on having breakfast just a few minutes before being hanged. Only four days later did we discover the reason for their request. They had been discussing the future life among themselves, and had come to the conclusion that even though just baptized they would not get to heaven for at least two or three days; hence they did not care to undertake such a long journey on an empty stomach! Apart from this they faced death with the greatest composure.

- The next world, the world of spirits, is seemingly under the rule of Tcu'kwu, as are all other things. But I have never heard the natives formulate such a belief in these precise terms.

If you have been good in this world, you will be happy in the next; if bad here, you will be bad in the next, and will have a lot of traveling to do before getting to "heaven",—if you ever get there at all.

A big funeral will go far to promote your welfare in the future

life. In olden days, before white rule came, slaves and sometimes wives were killed at the funeral of a chief.

MORALITY

The basic rule underlying Ibo morality seems to be: What is "natural" is right; what is "unnatural" is wrong. Thus twins are not natural, and therefore must be done away with. If a mother gives birth to twins, it must be that she has had some peculiar kind of intercourse with an evil spirit. Consequently one at least of the twins is evil; so, to be on the safe side do away with both. In the olden days, the mother with her twins was driven out into the *adjō'fiā*, the "bad bush", to be a prey to hunger or the wild beasts.

Cattle are not milked. This would be unnatural, as would also be the drinking of milk. The Ibo have their native cattle, but not in abundance. There are some tsetse flies in the region.

If an infant is born feet first, or if the upper teeth erupt before the lower, this too would be "unnatural", and the child would be killed or let die by exposure out in the "bad bush".

The Ibo have a strong sense of justice, and are keen to sense your friendly or unfriendly attitude toward them. If they know you have a genuine liking for them in your heart, a sympathetic and kindly feeling for them, they will forgive and overlook much you do. But if in your heart you really do not like them, you can do nothing with them, no matter how conscientiously you try to hide or to counteract your inner prejudice or antipathy. If they know you are positively unfriendly, they will never forgive you the injustices toward them of which you may be guilty. They may kowtow to the white man, but in reality they look down upon him as an inferior.

In the days before white rule, in many towns stealing was punishable by death. The worst insult that can be flung at a person is to call him a "thief man". Incidentally, another scarcely less offensive insult is to call him *An'ya ō'fiā* (or the older form, *Anu ō'fiā*), "person of the bush", (beast). This deprived him of his very humanity.

There is some gambling, but not much. There is little intoxication among the ordinary natives. The older chiefs drink European gin a good deal. The old men indulge in much palm-wine drink-

ing. They have little else to do. Palm wine is made of the sap of a very common variety of palm tree. When fresh, it is effervescent, sweet, and innocuous. After twenty-four hours it is as strong as whiskey. Untruthfulness to whites is very common, although we find our mission boys truthful enough.

Blood-revenge prevails. If you kill even by accident your life is forfeit. Infanticide, outside of "unnatural" cases, such as those mentioned above, is not a practice. Suicide, too, does not occur, apart from the native judicial custom of sometimes giving a condemned man a rope with which he must go and hang himself on a tree. Cannibalism used to be in vogue. Slaves were killed and eaten, especially on big feast days. The killing of wives and slaves at chiefs' funerals, and the scapegoat human sacrifice, have been mentioned previously. The sport of wrestling is keenly and strenuously indulged in by the Ibo, but I have never seen the participants lose their temper.

There is no particular sex instruction, but also there is no secrecy, no hiding. The facts are learned by the young just naturally. Clothing is scant. In the old days boys were not allowed to wear a loin cloth until they became *okolobia* (see *infra*). In some districts girls still wear no clothing whatever until they marry. There appears to be no relation between clothing or lack of it and Ibo sex morality, and for that matter, between the latter and the prevalent absence of secrecy. Among the unmarried pagan young, sex conditions seem to be fairly good, though by no means ideal. Among the Christianized youth of both sexes, conditions are quite good.

If, however, an unmarried girl gives birth to a child, she is not disgraced, nor does public opinion insist upon marriage of the girl with the child's father. The child in this case becomes the property of the girl's father, or if he is dead, of her elder brother, if she has one, or else of her chief male relative. Neither contraception nor solitary vice appears to be practised.

Polygyny is prevalent. With many men at least, especially chiefs, polygyny is less a matter of sex craving, and more one of prestige and profit. The more wives a man has, the bigger man he is. Again, wives are economic assets. They do not work much in the fields, but they engage in barter. What a wife earns

through barter goes to her husband. If a man saves money, he is apt to "invest" it by "purchasing" an additional wife.

A girl of marriageable age is purchased and the brideprice goes to her father, or, if he be dead, to her elder brother or male relative who has inherited her along with the cattle and the rest of the estate.

In the same family compound will live three or four generations of kin by blood and marriage,—the great grandfather, grandfather, and so forth. Sex relations within the family compound,—between either blood relatives or in-laws,—were punishable with death in the olden times. Near relatives do not intermarry. But the natives customarily marry within their own town or village.

Abstinence from marital relations for three years around childbirth is *de rigueur*. To give birth to another child during this period is looked upon as a very serious thing.

Mothers are held in high respect by their sons. Even when fully grown up and adult, a son will consult his mother on important matters, or if he is in trouble. He may also consult his father, but mostly he goes to his mother for counsel. The mother's brother has not much to say.

The natives are not demonstrative in their affection. Hence the casual white observer is apt to judge them as lacking in finer feelings. In reality, their feelings toward relatives and friends are deep. Very genuine affection is shown also to outsiders, such as missionaries, who are on friendly terms with the natives. Hospitality is in honor. The offering of the okola nut by a host to a stranger or visitor and the eating of it in common with the stranger are a token of peace and friendship. Once this is offered and partaken of, the stranger becomes a guest and is perfectly safe.

RELIGION AND MORALITY

The links between religion and morality are pretty weak. In a very general fashion, tribal ways and institutions, including the moral code, are probably viewed vaguely as in conformity with the wish of the beneficent supernatural beings. But the tribal ways and institutions are not looked upon as having been inaugurated by Tcu'kwu or his subordinates, nor as being his or their explicit commands.

The good and the wicked fare somewhat differently in the future

life, but such difference of fate apparently follows automatically from behavior. So far as the writer could discover, neither Tcu'kwu nor his subordinate spirits reward the good or punish the wicked in this life or in the next.

The village or family guardian spirits would protect the members of the village or family from harm that might come from natural forces or from man. Thus they would shield their protégés against thieves and murderers, not however, it would seem, from concern for the moral law as such, but purely from concern for the interests of their devotees.

If a child should steal or be guilty of some other moral misdemeanor, his parents would beat him. But they do not apparently propose any religious motives to him to train him in the Ibo straight and narrow way. Natives may perhaps invoke bogeys to frighten children, but we have never heard of such. Boys after the age of puberty are in many districts obliged to prove their virility at a fixed feast. Only after so doing are they considered real members of the tribe. After this ceremony, they are called *Okolobia*, "the young man comes". But at this adolescent rite, seemingly no moral instruction is given. It may be added that from about the age of seven, a boy, although usually continuing to live at home with his parents, is largely self-supporting and "on his own".

The Ibo swear on their jujus or charms, but it is not easy to determine to what extent this custom has been influenced by the prevalent English court procedure. They appear to believe that punishment will overtake the perjurer, but actually they lie quite freely even when swearing on their jujus.

To sum up: The Ibo have a religion and a moral code, but these twain, if they meet at all, meet as very distant acquaintances. There may possibly be religious concepts and relations thereof with morality which are kept carefully hidden by the native from the eyes of the whites, but five years of intimate and friendly contact with the people did not reveal them to the present writer.

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN
RELIGION AND MORALITY**

AT the annual meeting of the Conference in 1930, it was suggested by one of the missionaries present, and the suggestion was approved by other members, that from time to time there be published in *Primitive Man* short questionnaires on topics on which information is especially desired and needed, with the recommendation that the missionaries who receive *Primitive Man* send in to the Conference such information from their respective fields. The questionnaires, it was emphasized, should be brief, as missionaries have their hands full looking after their charges. The appended questionnaire is the first given in accordance with the above suggestion.

Our first-hand data on the relations between religion and morality among primitive peoples are very meager and, in a large number of cases, open to question as to their accuracy. Information from missionaries on this important topic will be gratefully received, and will throw light on an obscure corner of primitive culture. In answering do not trouble about literary form. The accurate factual data are what we need. From this end we can easily put the information in literary form for publication. The answers may be given in any modern European language.

General Information. Name of tribe; geographical location of and territory occupied by tribe; language spoken by tribe.

Summary information on your own knowledge of native language(s), on your length of residence among tribe and on your sources of information (observation, inquiry, verification of data), add much to the scientific value of your contribution.

The more detailed the information is, the better. Detailed qualified statements are more valuable than general unqualified ones. Concrete incidents, events, sayings, etc., that illustrate detailed or general statements are most desirable.

Native names of customs, rites, etc., are valuable. Please write native names very distinctly, or print them, unless contribution be typewritten.

Summary of moral code. What is the native (a) ideal and (b) practice as regards: obedience, generosity, control of temper, truthfulness, honesty, temperance, gambling, chastity among

married and unmarried, respect for parents and elders, respect for human life (murder, infanticide and abortion, cannibalism and exact nature thereof, suicide), hospitality, care of the aged and sick, etc?

Is there a double code in two senses: (a) one code towards fellow-tribesmen, another code or no code toward outsiders; (b) one code of chastity for men, another stricter one for women?

Do the natives distinguish between non-obligatory custom, rules of etiquette, and moral precepts? Does the infringement of taboos bring punishment automatically, or magically, or through infliction by personal or supernatural beings?

Are there folk-tales, fables, proverbs, etc., that contain definite moral elements?

Summary of religion. Is there a belief in and worship of a Supreme Being? Of inferior gods and beings? Of ghosts or ancestors? Magic? Future life and nature thereof?

Relationship of religion to morality. 1. Does there exist belief in reward or punishment after death in accordance with good or bad moral conduct on earth? Is such reward or punishment bestowed by supernatural beings? If so, by whom? Or does it just follow automatically?

2. Is the whole social order looked upon as instituted by or in conformity with the will of a Supreme Being or of lesser supernatural beings?

3. Are oaths or ordeals used? What supernatural beings, if any, are invoked in oaths or ordeals?

4. Do supernatural beings protect their devotees against thieves, murderers, or other malefactors?

5. Are children threatened with harm or punishment from bogeys, maleficent spirits, cannibal giants, or other fabulous beings, if they disobey or misbehave themselves?

6. Are any rites, sacrifice, religious practices, etc., looked upon as obligatory duties to the Supreme Being or to other supernatural beings or ancestors?

7. Are the precepts of the moral law, so far as they concern "love of neighbor" (truthfulness, honesty, respect for life, etc.) looked upon as the will of the Deity or of lesser gods, spirits, or ancestors? Is the Supreme Being or are other supernatural beings pleased when men observe these precepts and displeased when they disobey them?

8. Is observance of or disobedience to these precepts rewarded or punished by the Supreme Being or by other supernatural beings? In this life? In the next world? If so, what is the nature of the reward and punishment?

9. Are religious motives (reverence, fear, affection, duty, etc., to supernatural beings) proposed to and inculcated in the young as part of everyday moral training? Or are exclusively natural, secular, social, or egoistic motives proposed and inculcated?

10. Are puberty rites or similar ceremonies performed around the period of adolescence at which moral or religious instruction is given?

11. What natural, secular, non-religious motives and forces bring about such observance of the moral law by young and adults, as exists?

12. Are there notable differences among individuals and families in the same village or tribe? Are some individuals and families more faithful in practice to the tribal moral ideal than are others? More religious-minded than others? More insistent upon religious motives for moral conduct? (In view of the tendency of white visitors and travelers to make sweeping generalizations about the virtues and vices of *whole* tribes, this point of *individual* or *family* differences in moral conduct and in religious motives is of special importance, and our scientific information upon the point is relatively very meager.)

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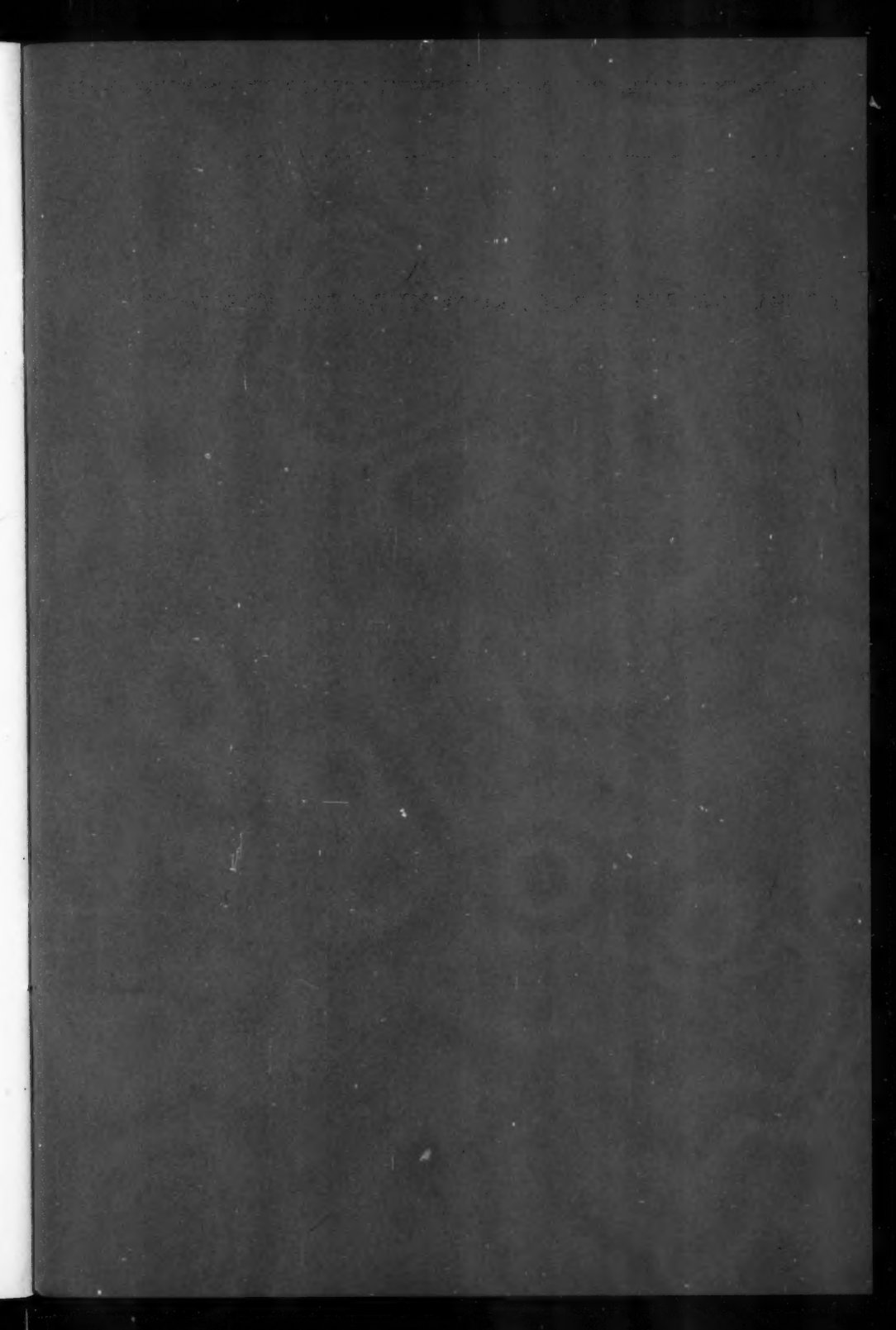
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